



California Private Car Sale Checklist

Use this checklist to prepare for a private vehicle sale in California. Requirements can vary by vehicle type, lien status, and situation, so always confirm with the California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) before completing the transaction.

QUICK ANSWER

California sellers must sign the back of the title, complete the odometer disclosure section, and file the Notice of Transfer and Release of Liability (NRL) online at dmv.ca.gov within 5 business days of sale. A valid smog certificate is required for most 1976+ vehicles over 4 years old. The buyer has 10 days to submit the signed title and fees to a California DMV office.

KEY FACTS

State	California
Agency	California Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV)
Process	See official source
Notary required	No
Bill of sale	Conditional
Odometer disclosure	Yes
Filing deadline	10 days
Last reviewed	May 10, 2026

QUICK REFERENCE

NOTARY No	BILL OF SALE Conditional	ODOMETER Yes	INSPECTION Not specified
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IMPORTANT DEADLINES

Within 10 days
Buyer must transfer title within 10 days of purchase

PRINTABLE CHECKLIST

Seller checklist

- ☐ **Signed vehicle title** **REQUIRED**
The seller must sign the title over to the buyer. Sign exactly as your name appears on the title.
- ☐ **Odometer disclosure statement** **REQUIRED**
Required by federal law for vehicles less than 10 years old under 16,000 lbs. Usually completed on the title itself.
- ☐ **Bill of sale** **RECOMMENDED**
A written record of the sale including VIN, price, date, buyer and seller information. Requirements vary by state.
- ☐ **Vehicle history report (recommended)** **RECOMMENDED**
Not required but strongly recommended. Helps buyer verify ownership and history.
- ☐ **Release of liability / notice of sale filed with state** **CONDITIONAL**
Protects the seller from liability after the vehicle is sold. Requirements and process vary by state.
- ☐ **Lien release (if vehicle had a loan)** **CONDITIONAL**
If there is an outstanding loan on the vehicle, the lienholder must release the lien before or at the time of sale.

Required forms

- ☐ **Signed vehicle title** **REQUIRED**
The certificate of title signed over to the buyer.
- ☐ **Odometer Disclosure Statement** **CONDITIONAL**
May be on the title itself or a separate form for older titles.



FEES

Check official DMV fee schedule — Private party vehicle transfer fee (Fees include title transfer, registration, and county fees.)

SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS

Notary: No — California generally does not require notarization for private vehicle sales.

Bill of sale: Conditional — Not required by state law but strongly recommended. Use a private-party form or written receipt.

Odometer disclosure: Yes — Required on the title for vehicles less than 10 years old. The seller completes the odometer section on the back of the title.

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

- 1 Seller signs the title on the back in the space for seller's signature.
- 2 Seller completes the odometer disclosure section on the title.
- 3 Both parties complete a bill of sale (recommended).
- 4 Seller files Notice of Transfer and Release of Liability (NRL) at dmv.ca.gov within 5 days of sale.
- 5 Buyer submits the signed title, smog certificate (if required), and fees to a DMV office within 10 days.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Seller not filing the Notice of Transfer and Release of Liability, which can result in liability for tickets and accidents.
- Buyer not registering within 10 days, resulting in late fees.
- Missing odometer disclosure on the title.
- Selling without a current smog certificate when required.

OFFICIAL SOURCES

California DMV — Transfer of Title

<https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/vehicle-registration/titles/title-transfers-and-changes/>

CA Notice of Transfer (NRL)

<https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/vehicle-registration/titles/title-transfers-and-changes/notice-of-transfer-and-release-of-liability-nrl/>

California DMV

<https://www.dmv.ca.gov>

CA DMV Forms

<https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/forms/>